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ABSTRACT

In 1983, the Association of Research Libraries adopted as its third principal objective for a 5-year plan: "to increase the number of member libraries engaged in programs to preserve their collections." ARL efforts to achieve this objective are aimed at helping libraries meet this responsibility locally and these guidelines propose an appropriate minimum preservation effort that each research library should seek to attain. Recognizing that there is an almost infinite set of conditions that could be included in a guideline for minimum preservation efforts, the ARL has focused on five important aspects which should be attainable by its membership: (1) development of a local program statement defining preservation goals and objectives; (2) compilation of a set of statistics documenting the annual preservation activity; (3) development of a coordinated national effort to film or otherwise copy library collections; (4) housing of materials in appropriate environmental conditions; and (5) allocation of a specified minimum budgetary amount for preservation. A Research Library Group statement of minimum preservation obligations for primary collecting responsibility and a brief bibliography of other Office of Management Studies (OMS) sources of information on preservation are included. (THC)

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Guidelines for Minimum Preservation Efforts in ARL Libraries

Since physical deterioration of research library collections is a well known matter of particular concern, the ARL has adopted as its third principal objective in its 1983 five year plan: "To increase the number of member libraries engaged in programs to preserve their collections." That document acknowledges that individual research libraries bear responsibility for preserving their collections as part of the collective resources of the research libraries of North America. ARL efforts to achieve this objective will be aimed at helping libraries meet this local responsibility. ARL should provide leadership and, to assist in this important task, guidelines are needed to suggest an appropriate minimum preservation effort that each research library should seek to attain.

"Preservation" is here meant to be broadly inclusive of efforts to maintain collections that are intended for use by future generations. This obligation of our present generation needs to be expressed in a set of activities that provides appropriate protection and some assurance of the continued availability of those materials that are now in, or are being added, to research library collections. Thus, for this purpose, a preservation program is defined to include in-house salaries and benefits, supplies, contracted physical repair, all binding and rebinding, restoration of materials, housing of preservation master films, and other preservation activities such as microfilming and other duplication applied specifically to provide lasting copies.

"Minimum" is here used to mean a desirable and presumably practical level of moderate strength to which all ARL libraries should aspire in the course of this decade. Once attained, it is a level which should be able to be maintained over the long term. It is well below an optimum level, and indeed it is far below what the more ambitious libraries with good financial support can attain. It is hoped that this minimum level is one which by 1988 at least half of the ARL membership could attain or exceed; and by the end of this decade all ARL libraries could have attained or exceeded.

The elements of a minimum effort are diverse. There are few activities in a research library that do not in one fashion or another affect the longevity of materials. A comprehensive preservation effort certainly includes attention to the atmospheric environment in which the materials are housed and used. It could include the training methods used for staff handling of materials, the photocopy operations, the acid content of bookplates, the quality of bookstack shelving, the ultraviolet filtration of fluorescent tubes, and even the very nature of the materials that are selected for addition to the collections. (See the Appendix for an attempted statement of responsibility by one organization.)

Recognizing that there is an almost infinite set of conditions that could be included in a guideline for minimum preservation effort, the ARL has chosen five aspects which seem possible of attainment by its membership. Taken together they should constitute a good base of minimum effort.

1) Local program statement: Every library should have a document defining its preservation goals and objectives together with a statement of current and prospective preservation activities. Such a document should at the least include a description of the various preservation program elements that currently exist in the library and should

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outline those that it will seek to provide within a short period of years. The document would not detail the specifics of the program. Rather it constitutes a general program statement that would convey to its staff, organizational officers and trustees, and to other ARL members a clear sense of the content of the program, the direction that is intended by the library administration, and the strength and emphasis with which it is to be pursued.

2) Statistics: There should regularly be compiled a set of statistics that will document the annual preservation activity and present over a period of time a picture of the change in the activity. Such data at the least should include:

- the FTE staff assigned to the preservation activity;
- the dollars expended for binding;
- the dollars expended for preservation microfilming;
- the dollars expended for rare object conservation;
- the number of master microfilm negative reels in its collection;
- the number of preservation photocopy titles made;
- the number of items mended and restored and;
- the number of items receiving protective containers.

3) National participation: All current efforts to film or otherwise copy for preservation purposes should be part of a coordinated national effort and consequently there should be three correlative activities. First, before making a decision to film, a careful search must be made for an existing archival master negative that can be copied. Second, there should be adherence to archival standards in the production, storage and use of master microfilm negatives whenever they are made. And third, the records for those master microfilm negatives should be contributed to the National Union Catalog or the comparable listing of newspapers, and/or should be contributed to at least one major bibliographic utility in order to ensure online availability of bibliographic records for preservation copies of films.

4) Environmental conditions: Materials in all collections that are unique in the library, and those for which a primary collection responsibility as part of a national collection coordinated effort has been assumed, should be housed in an environment that is filtered and air conditioned such as to temper the natural extremes of temperature and humidity. While this minimum does not specify the mechanical requirements of the air conditioning system, it is presumed that the minimum is at least a system which has cooling, humidity control and particulate filtration. Optimum conditions and archival standard conditions would of course be much more rigorous, requiring closed stacks, limited access to certain materials, and other protective measures, but these are not mandated at the minimum level.

5) Current budgetary effort: The library should allocate to preservation an amount equal to at least ten percent of its materials budget or four percent of its overall budget. Whereas academic and research libraries currently spend for preservation, as defined above, from 1% to as much as 21% of their current operating budgets, only those programs in the range above 4% of expenditures can be said to be

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moderately strong and emerging into maturity. While this 4% figure is a subjective judgement, it is like any service standard that is meant to provide a rough characterization of what may be relatively strong and vigorous, yet in need of improvement and possibly less than the institution can achieve with some additional effort. This has to be an approximation in many libraries due to the fact that local accounting may not facilitate aggregation of expenses for preservation as defined.

The exact allocation of the preservation budgetary resources to various activities is a matter that can only be resolved locally. Thus, no attempt is made to suggest the apportionment except to call attention to the illustrative activities in the above definition of preservation.

(Comment: This four percent is a guess as to what magnitude of program may achieve equilibrium, as much progress made in preservation as will offset the rate of deterioration over the long haul. Indeed, further experience in the extent of preservation effort needed in order to begin to break even on the rate of deterioration may well suggest that 10% or even more may be necessary as a minimum. Research libraries with an exceptionally high proportion of manuscripts on poor paper or printed materials from the period with the worst paper may in fact have to expend what to others may seem an exhorbitant proportion of their operating funds on preservation if they intend to achieve equilibrium. There could therefore be an optimum level of support, which may at individual libraries be several times the minimum level suggested above. And it should be no surprise, and certainly imply no managerial criticism, if a majority of ARL libraries today fail to exceed the minimum. Especially when dollars are scarce, priorities must be set for what can and cannot be achieved. It is probably the case that every library feels that it is inadequately coping with preservation deficiencies.)

This guideline for a minimum preservation effort was prepared in the light of informed opinion in 1983. The state of technical and scientific knowledge about the nature and rate of deterioration of library materials, and of methods for their stablization or strengthening, is still primitive enough that the current generation cannot with certainty say what should be a minimum preservation effort or an optimum preservation effort over the long term. As a consequence, this guideline will be reviewed by ARL every three years. Additions and modifications are to be expected as experience casts additional light on the topic. It is intended that this guideline serve as an encouragement, as a benchmark for individual effort, and not that it be used for accreditation purposes. The field of preservation is too uncertain to warrant such a rigid approach.

On the other hand, the extent of deteriorated collections is now of such overwhelming magnitude that the current generation must set some goals and strive mightily to achieve these if in fact we are to guard against leaving for our successors a literally impossible task. On that basis, the ARL believes that this guideline for minimum preservation effort is a step in the right direction, and it is commended to ARL members for individual application. The aggregate result of our efforts should serve to strengthen the research capacities of our libraries for the years ahead. This is our obligation to future generations of scholars.

The ARL Committee on Preservation
of Research Library Materials
June 21, 1984

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Minimum Preservation Obligations for RLG Members in Areas of Primary Collecting Responsibility

Member libraries should recognize special obligations to maintain and preserve their collections in areas of primary collecting responsibility (as defined by the Collection Management and Development Committee) and to enhance preservation of these materials as resources permit. These in-depth subject collections not only serve the holding library and its patrons but are also a resource for the whole of the Research Libraries Group and the larger population of scholars and researchers nationwide. Such collections should be maintained in good condition in hard copy or microform to allow the researcher continued access.

Material is considered to be in good condition if it can be subjected to normal use, now and into the foreseeable future, without incurring noticeable damage. Publications on paper are not in good condition if the paper is so brittle that it will crack or break when handled or photocopied, if it cannot be bound or rebound, or if it is highly acidic (for example, groundwood paper such as newsprint) and therefore likely to become brittle within a few years. Bound volumes are not in good condition if the internal binding structure is broken, or if covers are not intact. Publications on a film base (microforms, slides, etc.) are not in good condition if the film is torn, stained, scratched, or otherwise degraded to the point that it cannot be read on proper viewing equipment, or if the film housing (reel, slide mount) is damaged. Mutilated volumes are by definition not in good condition, and priority should be given to replacing missing or mutilated portions of library materials.

If volumes are not in good condition, they may be repaired, rebound or restored where possible, if this is adequate to maintain the title in good condition. If not, the library may acquire a reprint or microform replacement if available. If this is not possible, the item may be filmed or reproduced in an archival hard-copy format.

Approved by the RLG Preservation Committee, October 15, 1981
Approved by the RLG Collection Management and Development Committee, January 21, 1982

Sources of Information on Preservation from
ARL's Office of Management Studies

Planning for Preservation: OMS SPEC Kit #66. 1980.
Includes initial planning reports and recommendations, program and policy statements, and historical perspectives on preservation development.

Preparing for Emergencies and Disasters: OMS SPEC Kit #69. 1980.
Includes excerpts from committee reports, manuals, plans, and case histories covering disaster preparedness, protecting people and property, and salvaging library materials.

Basic Preservation Procedures: OMS SPEC Kit #70. 1981.
Includes policy statements, guidelines, and procedural instructions on the physical care and protection of library materials, as well as reproduction and decision-making.

Preservation Planning Program Resource Notebook, compiled by Pamela W. Darling. OMS 1982.
A compilation of articles and documents on preservation organization and administration, the physical environment in relation to preservation, protection of materials, surveying collection conditions, disaster preparedness, microfilming the physical nature and treatment of various kinds of materials, and education and training for preservation.